

ADECA – Building Better Alabama Communities

By: Carrie Banks • Communications Director • ALM



Created by an act of the Legislature in 1983, the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) administers a broad range of state and federal programs that contribute to the Department's mission: *Building Better Alabama Communities*. Led by a director who is appointed by the Governor and a 10-member Legislative Oversight Commission, the Department is divided into six divisions – Community and Economic Development; Energy; Law Enforcement and Traffic Safety (LETS); Water Resources; Workforce Development; and Surplus Property – each managed by a chief hired under the state merit system.

Each year, ADECA distributes hundreds of millions of federal dollars to Alabama's municipalities and counties as well as several nonprofit agencies to support economic development and infrastructure projects, law enforcement and traffic safety, job training, recreation development, energy conservation and assistance to low-income families. In addition, ADECA monitors and protects Alabama's water resources as well as distributes state and federal surplus property to local governments and other qualified organizations. ADECA has provided administrative support to projects aimed at increasing development in rural areas and Alabama's Black Belt and has helped the state cope with numerous natural disasters, including assistance with rebuilding after the devastating April 2011 tornado outbreak.

"The basic goal of ADECA is to take block grant dollars that come to the state and award those competitively or discretionarily to the cities, towns and counties of Alabama – those are our customers," said Jim Byard, Jr., who was appointed ADECA Director by Governor Robert Bentley in January 2011.

Byard said ADECA works with local leadership to form a partnership. "It's not for ADECA to go into a city or town and tell somebody what they should be doing," he said. "It's up to that local leader – whether they're elected or a civic leader – to tell us what they want to do and we're their partner to help them get the funding – for anything from a pure infrastructure project like streets, water and sewer to a community enhancement project like a senior center, community center, community park or fire station – any type of community development project."

Uniquely Qualified

After serving nine years with the Alabama Highway Department (now the Department of Transportation) and 19 years in local government, Byard is no stranger to municipal

challenges. Voters first elected him to the Prattville City Council in 1992 at age 26 where he served two terms, one as council president. He became the youngest mayor in the city's history when elected in 2000. Throughout his municipal government career, Byard was active with the Alabama League of Municipalities, receiving both his Basic and Advanced CMO designations, chairing League committees and serving as League president from 2004-05. When an F3 tornado struck Prattville in 2008, Byard learned firsthand about responding and recovering from a natural disaster.

Thanks to his long-term tenure in local government, Byard understands the importance for him as ADECA Director to be accessible to municipal officials. "When you're a mayor, you're on the line every day," he said. "Your constituents test you every day. When I came over to ADECA, I'd had 12 years of being tested every day as mayor. When I interviewed with the Governor, he said 'I want a local official to run ADECA because a local official knows how to leverage a federal dollar – and that's what you do at ADECA.' So I think the governor knows the value of our local



Former League past presidents ADECA Director Jim Byard (2004-05) and Mayor Johnny Ford (1989-90) discuss economic development opportunities for the City of Tuskegee. Photo by ADECA.



Auburn University students involved in a three-year community development and civic program visit with ADECA Director Jim Byard to present him with a copy of Auburn University's Living Democracy, a magazine that chronicles the students' 10-week stay in several Alabama municipalities: Collinsville, Elba, Linden and Selma. The program's goal was to help students understand the assets of small communities while becoming involved in local projects that benefited the areas. Photo by ADECA.

officials because he reached out and got a local official to run the agency that interfaces with our local governments. ADECA will travel wherever we need to travel to visit a community that needs our assistance.”

Byard said one of the most rewarding parts of his job is the opportunity to work in every part of the state visiting with local leaders in order to understand the pressures they have at home and then to have some role in solving a problem. He also enjoys being involved in the enhancements happening throughout Alabama. “There are some exciting projects happening,” he said. “Small and large, I’ve gotten to visit with leaders across the state and affect something in their communities as they work on projects that develop a sense of pride and a sense of place in their hometown. And that’s awfully important. There are still elected officials in office I knew when I was mayor of Prattville and when I was president of the League of Municipalities who I get to interface with and who visit me and I appreciate that – it’s fun to work with the people I served with.”

Community and Economic Development

Community and Economic Development is ADECA’s largest division. The agency awards Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) as well as grants from the Appalachian Regional Commission and the Delta Regional Authority to complete projects needed to attract new industry or improve quality of life.

CDBG funding supports projects that boost employment, help address chronic community development needs and improve living conditions. Grants typically range from \$200,000 to \$500,000 and are awarded to local governments using funds provided to Alabama by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). To qualify for CDBG funding, a project must meet at least one of three criteria: 1. at least 51 percent of beneficiaries are from low and moderate income households; 2. reduce or prevent slums/blight; or 3. meet an urgent community need that poses a serious threat to the health and welfare of a community where adequate resources are not available.

CDBG grants are generally used for infrastructure projects that improve roads, drainage and public water and sewer services. Funds are also awarded for neighborhood and downtown revitalization projects and to rehabilitate homes occupied by low-to-moderate income households.

ADECA distributes CDBG money through several different funds. **Competitive** grants are awarded annually in three categories: counties, large cities with populations greater than 3,000

and small cities with populations of 3,000 or less. **Economic Development** grants are awarded to local governments for infrastructure development needed to support new or expanding industry to create or retain jobs. **Community Enhancement** grants support projects beyond infrastructure needs and are used to improve quality of life. **Planning** grants are awarded to help communities adequately plan for growth.

According to Byard, there is generally a time limit for grant implementation as well as a matching requirement. “That match



Mayor Phil Segraves of Guin discusses economic development opportunities with ADECA Director Jim Byard. Photo by ADECA.

is not always a cash match,” he said. “Many times it’s an in-kind match. For CDBG, 20 percent is generally the required federal match, but it’s not always striking a check. If a city had to rent a piece of equipment, the rental for that equipment could be applied as the match. Or if they had to acquire property, the price of that acquisition could be the match. Volunteer hours and donated materials can be used towards a match.”

CDBG funding is versatile and can be a tremendous resource, especially for smaller communities. “What the state gets from HUD is a formula grant,” Byard said. “The last two years we’ve had in the neighborhood of a little over 21 million dollars. We take 5 million of that and set it aside for economic development only. The rest – in 2014 it was a little over 18 million dollars – is competitive. So that five million in economic development is used strictly for job creation awarded at the Governor’s discretion. We’ve used CDBG for Golden Dragon in Wilcox County. We’ve used it for a Love’s Truck Stop ... basically what happens is that a local official will come see us and say we’re getting a Love’s Truck Stop and we need a water line or an entrance road or something of that nature. Usually with a Love’s Truck Stop there are 25 to 30 jobs created, and – in a small community – that’s definitely economic development. It’s providing sales tax and jobs.”

In addition, CDBG Disaster Recovery Grants are administered through ADECA and can be used for projects such as repairing/replacing water and sewer lines, road construction, single and multi-family housing assistance and economic assistance to businesses. “We’re still working on rebuild projects nearly four years after the 2011 tornadoes,” Byard said and referenced the recently completed Cordova Piggly Wiggly – the town’s *only* grocery store – that reopened this past November after it was completely destroyed along with several other buildings during the tornado outbreak.

“We worked in every community affected by the 2011 tornadoes,” he said. “What the governor did after the tornadoes was to establish a long-term recovery section of ADECA (which was operational through the end of 2014). We had three employees whose jobs were to make sure that the mayor or commission chairman in the affected areas had a community liaison – so whatever problem they had with the state or federal government they had a liaison to call. Our people were in the community, attended their meetings and were part of their meetings to support whatever the need was in that community.”

Byard said the ADECA staff understands their efforts are local. “What’s a priority in one community is definitely not a priority in another,” he said. “We’ve got urban issues we work with and rural issues we work with – we’re the State’s department of local government. We’re the agency that takes block grant dollars from the federal government, and all the regulations that come with it, and makes sure the cities and towns can handle it.”



Graysville Mayor Mary Sue Morgan and ADECA Director Jim Byard discuss community development initiatives. Photo by ADECA.

ADECA supports a number of quality of life programs throughout Alabama through its Recreation and Conservation unit. Drawing from two federal grant programs – the U.S. Department of Interior’s Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Recreational Trails



The Most Trusted Experts For:

Mold Remediation

Asbestos Removal

Water Extraction

Sanitization & Dehumidification

Fire, Smoke and Storm Damage Recovery

**ARR is the FIRST and ONLY
call you’ll need to make.**

**100% Satisfaction Guaranteed
205-758-9558**



Former League past presidents Mayor Bobby Payne (1996-97) and ADECA Director Jim Byard (2004-05) discuss energy projects for the City of Tallassee. Photo by ADECA.

Program (RTP) – ADECA helps Alabama communities expand outdoor recreation opportunities from developing areas such as parks, playgrounds, ball fields, camping areas and wildlife refuges to developing and improving trails for walking, jogging, cycling, backpacking, horseback riding and other activities.

“We have a tremendous trail network across the state with some really cool projects,” Byard said. “It always amazes me to see a community unite on trail projects. It’s a way for communities – small communities, especially – to have some pride and an individual sense of place. The trails program has been in place for a while but what we’ve started trying to do is focus on destination trails – so you’re not just walking in a circle, you’re actually walking from Point A to Point B. Elkmont in Limestone County is a case study in what a trail can do. It’s a tiny little town that had four or five empty buildings that are now filled. It was an entrepreneurial spirit along a trail that has now become a known destination. We are currently working with the University of Alabama to develop a statewide trail app.”

Statewide Reach

ADECA has 200 employees who are responsible for everything from interfacing with local leaders to managing an annual budget of \$350-\$400 million. A portion of ADECA’s budget also helps fund several quasi-governmental entities such as Main Street, Alabama Communities of Excellence, Design Alabama, the 12 Regional Planning Commissions and the 23 community action agencies across Alabama. In addition, ADECA works closely with nearly every state department – from the

Department of Commerce on economic development initiatives to the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources on park and trail projects, the Department of Transportation on roads and transportation issues and the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency on traffic safety grants.

“ADECA has an important role to play and we’re very serious about our role,” Byard said. “You don’t see many projects around the state or in communities that ADECA doesn’t have some hand in.”

Maintaining the integrity of each grant is also a critical element for the ADECA staff. “We have a set of accountants, a set of attorneys and a set of the “back office staff” that handle the very important work of making sure these grants are managed in a legal manner – because if a community mismanages their money, the state’s on the line for that back to the feds,” he said. “Awarding the grant is the easy part. Making sure that you build the project to specs and manage it correctly is much more challenging. Every penny we award is from the taxpayer and so the taxpayers of Alabama deserve to know where that money went. We’re very cognizant of our projects: are they wise, are they legal and is there a return on investment for the taxpayers?”

Commitment to Alabama’s Communities

Byard is committed to helping Alabama’s communities – all of them. “What I tell every mayor is, if you didn’t get funded – with CDBG, LWCF, RTP or any program that we run – if you didn’t get funded, call me. I, *myself*, along with whoever runs that program, will come to your community and we will visit with you. We will look at your application and we will tell you to either expand or narrow your scope and how to write a better application for the

next year. We will travel wherever we need to travel to visit a community that needs our assistance.”

When asked what he’s most proud of from his four years with ADECA, Byard answers very simply that he’s proud of the continuity he’s brought to the department. As of January 21st, he is the longest serving ADECA Director in its nearly 32-year history. “You cannot expect an organization to be successful with a leader that changes every 18 months and, for a while, ADECA had a lot of change,” he said. “In the 12 years before I got here, there were seven ADECA Directors. The department needed some consistency and the employees deserved consistency.”

Byard looks forward to another four years serving Alabama’s communities. “It’s extremely rewarding to be able to travel the state and meet with local leaders,” he said. “I didn’t realize before I got here the breadth of ADECA. I knew CDBG grants and a little bit about workforce development but ADECA touches a *lot* of lives every day.” ■

ADECA is housed in the Alabama Center for Commerce building at 401 Adams Avenue in downtown Montgomery. For more information on ADECA, its departments and available grants, visit www.adeca.alabama.gov or give the agency a call at 334-242-5100. ADECA also has a Facebook page that is updated throughout the week: facebook.com/ADECAgov.

The League at 80

continued from page 18

this year tentatively followed by the complete operational program in early 2016.

Get involved to get the most out of your membership!

Of course, the League’s most valuable asset – and where it draws its greatest strength – is its membership. The League relies on *your* active participation to remain viable and relevant. Join a Policy Committee (for a complete list of the League’s five policy committees, visit alalm.org). Become a Certified Municipal Official. Take part in League lobbying efforts. Attend the Annual Convention and other training sessions. Sign up for the League’s e-newsletters. Like our Facebook page. Read *The Alabama Municipal Journal*. Visit www.alalm.org often.

After nearly 80 years, the League remains a vibrant, dynamic organization – one that continually evolves to support the needs of Alabama’s municipalities. We look forward to a successful 2015! ■

Mark Your Calendars!

2015 LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY CMO SESSION

Tuesday, April 7th in Montgomery.
Stay tuned for more information!

www.alalm.org/upcoming-training.html